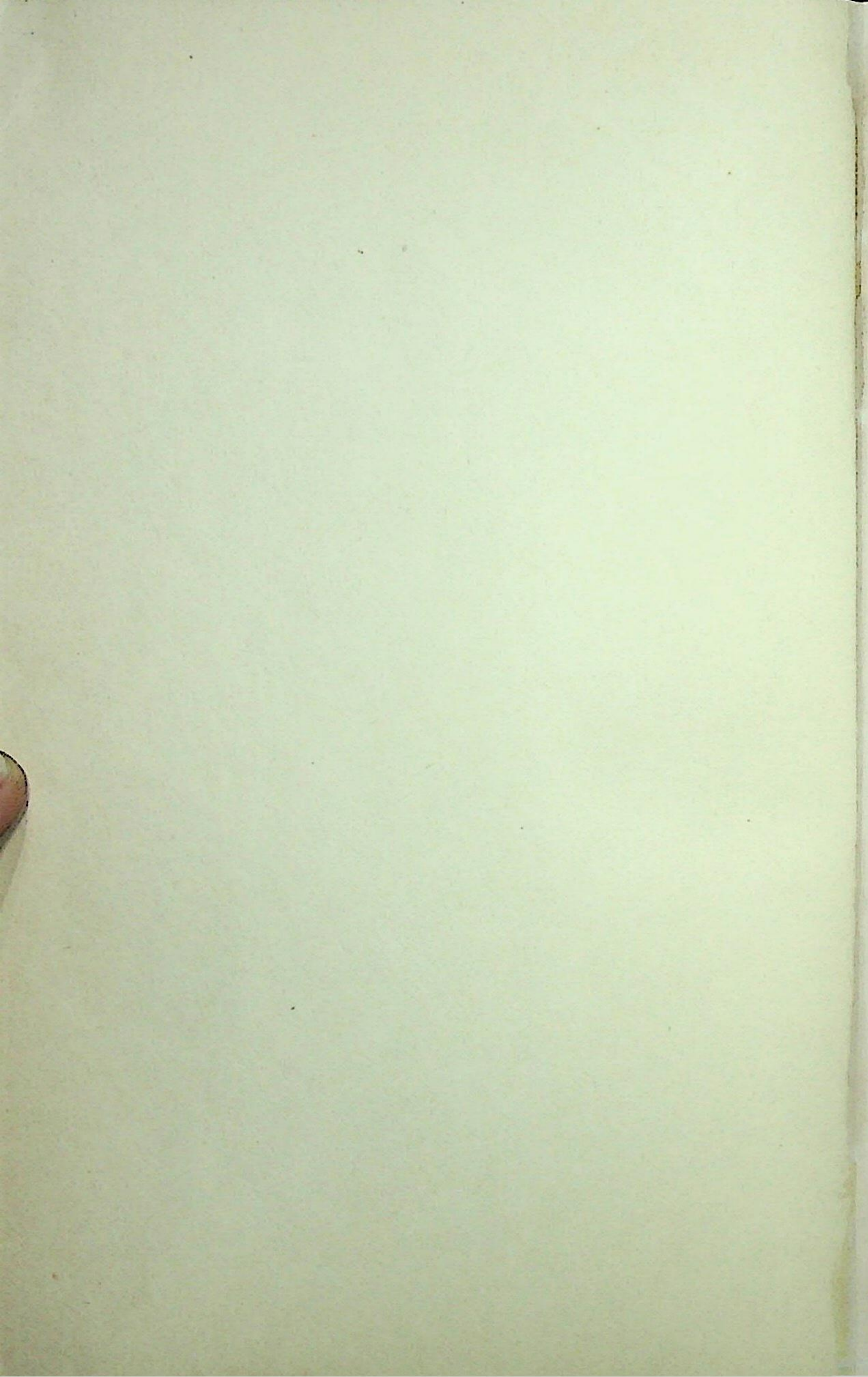
Banamali Das

Janaki Ballabha Mohanty



SAHITYA AKADEMI



BANAMALI DAS

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Banamali Das

Janaki Ballabha Mohanty



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I am also thankful to late Dr M. Mansinha, Sri R.K. Mishra, Sri K.C. Chand and Sri T. Misra for the English renderings made by them of a few songs of the late poet Banamali Das included in this volume.

Janaki Ballabha Mohanty



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The Poet

The poetic imagination as well as the creativity of ancient and medieval India, to a great extent, concentrated on depicting the divine love between Sri Radha and Sri Krushna. Innumerable songs and lyrics about this divinely mysterious romance have been composed by poets both in Sanskrit and the regional languages. *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva in Sanskrit, thousands of 'Divya Prabandha' written by Alwars in Tamil, the songs of Vidyapati in Maithili, the poems of Chandidas, Jnanadas and Govindadas in Bengali, the kirtans of Sankardeva and Madhab Kandali in Assamese and the songs of Meerabai in Gujarati are indeed immortal treasures of Indian literature.

Through ages, these songs have enraptured and captivated the hearts of millions of people. Even today, in vastly altered circumstances, these songs afford delight to listeners. The poet Banamali Das of Orissa is one such composer whose songs in Oriya are of a high order and have earned him unrivalled popularity in the land. Till today his songs are sung by people on festive occasions. They are set to tune and sung by musicians in musical gatherings, and also broadcast through radio. Many of these songs very often provide the motivating theme of the celebrated Odissi dance. Banamali is considered to be the foremost devotional poet of the medieval Oriya literature of the eighteenth century.

In this connection, it may be noted that there were two other poets bearing the same name who also made positive contribution to Oriya literature. The first among them who flourished in the later part of the sixteenth century composed *Rāsa* in Oriya. The second was the author of *Ichhavati*, a romantic poem in Oriya, the date of composition of which has been roughly fixed at the seventeenth century. The poet under discussion is the third and supposed to be the last in the series. He composed a number of devotional songs and hundreds of songs of rare beauty and excellence depicting the *'leela'* of Rama and Krushna.

Unfortunately, about the life and works of this celebrated devotional poet very little has come to light so far. However, in the following pages, an attempt has been made to give a brief account of the poet and his lyrical compositions.



I

The Poet

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II

Worship of Lord Jagannath and Vaishnav Lyrics

In the religious history of India the significance of the Jagannath cult as a symbol of religious synthesis is an admitted fact. Through ages, this cult has attracted and influenced the religious people as well as the saints and devotees of India. The impact of Jagannath worship can never be over emphasized so far as Oriya literature and the national life of the Oriyas are concerned. Though many deities are worshipped in Orissa, Lord Jagannath has been accepted as the Supreme Lord of this land. The main principle of the Jagannath cult is religious harmony. Through this cult, the Vaishnavite, the Saivite, the Sakta, the Nirguna and the Saguna forms of worship have been synthesised. Lord Jagannath has also been identified with the Buddha deemed as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu.

Since the beginning of Oriya literature, Jagannath, the supreme deity of this land, has been the fountain-head of inspiration to many poets of religious texts and lyrics. We get the specimen of old oriya prose from the chronicle of the Jagannath temple known as the *Madala Panji*. We get evidence of this from the fact that in the sixteenth century dramas were also being enacted on the stage in the temple of Lord Jagannath. Thus *Jagannath Vallabha Nataka* by Ray Ramananda was staged in this temple which Sri Chaitanya himself witnessed. Not only drama but also the dance form known as Odissi originated in the Jagannath temple through the ritualistic performances of *devdasis* in front of the Lord.

Many poets of Orissa have composed religious lyrics in Sanskrit, Hindi and Oriya basing their theme on Lord Jagannath. The rulers of Orissa also gave away all their wealth in the service and glory of Lord Jagannath. Through ages, Lord Jagannath has been symbolised as an epitome of all that is best in the life of the people of Orissa. He is their pride and prestige, their sole refuge. The pattern of thought, philosophy and culture that has developed in this country, makes Jagannath its central figure. In fact, Jagannath - consciousness has permeated into every stratum of the social life of Orissa.

Eventually, Jagannath not only became the state deity of Orissa but also rose to the position of the most important Vaishnav deity of India. In this connection, the questions naturally come to our mind as to when and how this cult of Jagannath came into being and since when is he being regarded as Lord Vishnu, the Almighty. There is as yet no satisfactory answer to this question.

According to legend, Lord Jagannath in the beginning used to be worshipped by a Savara named Viswabasu. Afterwards, Indradyumna, the king of Malava, with the help of his priest Vidyapati came to this place and built the temple of the Lord. The temple was consecrated by Brahma who also installed Lord Alarnath situated at a distance of about 18 km to the south of Puri.

From the study of legends it may be concluded that in the image and worship of Jagannath the Aryan and the non-Aryan elements have been synthesized. In the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Jagannath temple four images, Jagannath (form of Vishnu), Balaram (representing Siva), Subhadra (representing Sakti) and Sudarsan (the weapon of Vishnu) are installed. Besides, in the premises of the temple other deities of the Hindu pantheon such as Siva, Ganesa, Surya Nrusingha, Vimala, Saraswati, Laxmi etc. have also been installed, thus, harmonising the Vaishnav, Saiva, Sakta and Ganapatya forms of worship. The temple is primarily considered as a sacred seat of the Vaishnava sect. Prominent preachers of Vaishnavism from all over India in different centuries have come and sanctified this place.

According to scholars, Vaishnavism as a sect is relatively late in origin. It denotes worship of Vishnu and his different incarnations such as Krushna and Rama. Sometimes they are worshipped along with their consorts Radha, Laxmi and Sita. Vaishnavism developed in the fifth century A.D. combining different religious groups the most important being the Panchayatra and Bhagavata sects. During this time, it seems emphasis was given on the worship of Vasudeva Krushna. The Bhagavata cult had its ardent followers in the Tamil Land roughly between sixth and ninth centuries A.D. There were twelve Tamil devotional poets or Alwars who composed four thousand devotional songs constituting Vaishnava 'Prabandha' which are held in high esteem. The cult laid stress on Bhakti and consecration of all desire and action to Lord Vishnu in order to achieve his blessings.

Most probably the wave of Vaishnavism spread over Orissa through the preachings of Ramanuja (1056-1137). The deity in the temple of Alarnath is Lord Krishna, the God of Alwars. It is in the

south of Puri, en route south India. This is a clear indication that the worship of Krushna was brought to Orissa from the south. Krushna has also been identified with idol worshipped by the Adivasis of south-western Orissa where he is known as 'Savari Narayana'. Hence, it is rightly said that nowhere in the whole region of Orissa and Kalinga is Vaishnavism traceable prior to the Gupta period, and that it advanced towards Orissa from the south and from the west.[1]

During the reign of Ananta Varman Chodaganga Dev (1078-1147), who came from the south and overpowered the Somavansi dynasty of Orissa, Vaishnavism received royal patronage. During the last decade of his rule he built the biggest and the most magnificent temple of Jagannath or Purusottama (regarded as the Purna Brahma or Vishnu) at Puri.

It seems in the beginning only one image, the image of Jagannath, representing Vishnu was worshipped in the said temple. Gradually other images–Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsan were added. This might be the result of *Chaturvyuha Upasana*. In this connection the following observation is of significance :

"A modified form of Vyuhavad can, however, be traced in the joint worship of Baladeva, Krushna and Subhadra or Ekanamsa (sometimes identified with Subhadra, but sometimes with the Devi born as the daughter of Nanda - Gopa. Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita* (LVIII 37-39) gives rules for the construction of the composite image of Baladeva and Krushna with Ekanamsa standing between them. An inscription of the thirteenth century from Bhubaneswar, referring to the adoration of Baladeva, Krushna and Subhadra, points to the popularity of their worship in mediaeval Orissa."[2]

The seat of Lord Jagannath came to be known by several names such as Neelachal, Shrikshetra, Purusottamapuri and Puridham. This cult which is the quintessence of all religions attracted many religious preachers and persons of religious temperament to come and make Puri their spiritual home. This is one of the reasons why Sri Chaitanya, one of the greatest teachers of Vaishnavism, made Puri the centre of his religious activities in the sixteenth century.

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1. Advent of Visnuism in Orissa - H.V. Steetencron. The cult of Jagannath & Regional Tradition of Orissa. P.5
2. *Early History of Vaishnavism*, D.C. Sarkar, The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV

Chaitanya's long stay of about eighteen years at Puri was spent in singing the *leela* (achievements) of Sri Krushna, preaching religion and devoting himself to the service of Lord Jagannath. He visited Orissa during the reign of Prataprudra Dev. During the period the people of Orissa under the strong rule of Prataprudra enjoyed freedom and could practise their religion unaffected by external aggression and internal disorder. But at that time there was no peace in Bengal which was under the Muslim rule. There was also wide-spread corruption and this had greatly shattered the moral life of the Hindus. Because of this there was no favourable condition for spiritual practice there. From this point of view, Puri was a favourable harbour for spiritual practice. Over and above, the presence of the scholars at Puri attracted Chaitanya who felt that he had a better opportunity to serve Lord Jagannath if he settled at Puri. He was particularly enamoured of the company of devotees and scholars like Ray Ramananda.

Ray Ramananda was the royal representative and ruler of the southern part of Orissa and was then staying at Rajamahendri. Subsequently, he left the royal post and entirely devoted himself to leading a religious life in the company of Chaitanya and composed poems and dramas at Puri. This has been vividly described in the *Chaitanya Chartitamruta* in which Krishnadas Kabiraj, the Bengali biographer, has narrated through the mouth of Sri Chaitanya–how he learnt all the higher philosophy of *Prema Bhakti* from Ray Ramananda. This has also been admitted by scholars of Goudiya Vaishnavism :

"From the historical point of view, it appears that Chaitanya took the detailed idea of Radha-Krusna cult, as current in the Bengal school, from Ray Ramananda and transmitted it to Rupa Goswami at Prayaga and to Sanatan Goswami at Kasi. These two Goswamis and their nephew Jiva Goswami elaborated this idea and placed it on a philosophical basis in their numerous works. These three lived at Vrindavan, reclaimed the village and many other places in the district connected with the sacred memory of Krusna, transformed them into places of pilgrimage, and established a number of temples dedicated to Him. Since then, Vrundavan has become the great centre of Vaishnavism in north India. Puri was the centre of the south, where Sri Chaitanya lived after embracing monasticism."[3]

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3. A Survey of the Chaitanya Movement, Radha Govinda Nath, *The Cultural Heritage of India.*, Vol. IV.

Lord Krushna is the supreme deity; Vrundavan the holiest of holy places; worship through love (*Prema Bhakti*) *a la* Gopis the highest form of worhsip; and *Bhagavat* the most sacred book of prayers– these constitute the belief and preachings of Chaitanya. Besides, kindness to animals, devotion to God, Nama Dharma and Nama Sankirtana (chanting of names of the Lord aloud either individually or in group)–these are the key notes of his preachings. Universal love, i.e. love for all, irrespective of caste and creed, was the ideal of social reform or at least a democratic ideal in that age. However, despite all these things Chaitanya had not raised his voice directly against the social norms and principles. With devotion he had followed Hindu culture, its customs, principles and manners without its rigidity. In that remote past he was capable of establishing unity and friendship in Hindu society, uniting all by a single religious belief, living in one community irrespective of class and creed crossing the barrier of the contemporary fissiparous Hindu society. But as discussed earlier long before Chaitanya Vaishnavism was preached in Orissa and the worship of Vasudev Krushna had gained popularity. Krushna's figure found in the temple architecture of Orissa is its bright example. However, in course of time, the Utkaliya Vaishnavas accepted the religious principles of Lord Chaitanya, but did not discard the ancient religious tradition of Orissa. They combined Yogachar with Bhakti– unemotional logical knowledge with emotional devotion.

Though in Orissa, the teachings of Chaitanya spread apace through royal patronage, the religious writings of the five saint poets (Panchasakha) continued to spread among the people. The uproarious dance and chanting in a chorus (kirtan) accompanied by the loud clang of *jhanja* and *mridanga* was as much in vogue in this country as the calm, serene and peaceful *bhajans*. The dual practices continue till today.

The Utkaliya Vaishnavas have accepted Jagannath as 'Purna Brahma (Abatari)' and Puris as 'Nityasthali' but the Gaudiya Vaishnavas have recognised Srikrushna as 'Purnaa Brahma' and Vrundavan as 'Nityasthali'. We see the difference in 'Nama Mantra' between Utkaliya and Gaudiya religions. When the Utkaliyas recognised 'Yogachar', 'Sadachakra Bheda' and awakening of 'Kulakundalini' as the steps of religious attainment the Gaudiya Vaishnavas did not find any necessity of 'Yogachar' except the hymns, worship, offerings, kirtans and the chantings of Vishnu's name. Gaudiyas emphasize vividly on the loud 'Sankirtan and Nama Bhajan' while the Utkaliya Vaishnavas follow', Nirakara Bhajan', 'Sunya Bhajan' and 'Sarira Bheda Bhajan'.

The popularity of Sri Chaitanya brought in its wake a love of Vaishnav lyrics in Orissa. These lyrics are commonly known as *Padavali*. The word for the first time was found in the famous Sanskrit work *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva to denote musical composition where the poet has described his own lyrical composition as 'Lalit Komal Kanta Padavali'. It seems, the Vaishnav poets of Bengal towards the beginning of the sixteenth century used this word in the same sense for their lyrical compositions written on the model of Jayadeva dealing with the love of Radha and Krushna. Since then the word Padavali is mostly used in Bengal to denote songs dealing with the love of Sri Krushna and in Oriya the word is often used in the same sense.

Lord Chaitanya used to sing songs on Krushna *leela* written by Vidyapati, Chandidas and Ray Ramananda. Some of these songs were also written in a mixed language called 'Vrajaboli'. As a result of Sri Chaitanya's long stay in Orissa and the influence of his personality and religious activities, such songs alongwith those written in the Vrajaboli language gained popularity to some extent in Orissa. During this century a few Oriya poets like Ray Ramananda, Jadupati, Damodar Champati, Madhabi Dasi, Chand Kabi, Kanhai Khuntia and others composed songs in Vrajaboli language. It is natural that the poets were inclined to write songs on the same theme in Oriya. The first known poet who wrote songs in Oriya based on the Rāsa of Lord Krushna is Banamali Das of the sixteenth century.

But it can be safely said that inspite of the preachings of Sri Chaitanya, his doctrine of Prema Bhakti or Raga Marga could not gain superiority over the indigenous cult of the land during the period. No trace of influence of the preaching of Sri Chaitanya can be found on the writings of the five saint poets of Orissa such as Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, who are supposed to have flourished during the time of Sri Chaitanya and a few years after him. However, in the subsequent century the doctrine of Prema Bhakti was gradually assimilated with the indigenous cult of the land and we find effusion of such songs in Oriya, particularly from the pen of Dinakrushna Das of the latter part of the seventeenth century.

The eighteenth century may be regarded as the golden age of the Vaishnav lyrics. Many devoted Vaishnav poets like Dinabandhuraj Harichandan, Sadananda Kavisurya Bramha (1738-?) and our poet, Banamali Das wrote beautiful songs dealing with the *leela* (activities) of Sri Krushna. Even the non-Vaishnav poets like Upendra Bhanja, Rama Krushna, Brajanath Badajena and Jadumani Mohapatra were also attracted to compose such songs. It seems

the theme became a popular source of inspiration and turned into a poetic convention during the period.

Vaishnav lyrics in Oriya have been enriched by the writings of Banamali. Though brought up in the atmosphere of Jagannath worship he accepted Gaudiya faith in a modified form. This is evident from the songs and Vaishnav *padavalis* composed by him.

III

Banamali and his time

From the political point of view the eighteenth century was the darkest period of Orissa. During this period, Orissa was under the dual rule of the Mughals and Marathas. Since, they were in constant conflict, the state of Orissa during the entire period was torn by civil strife and disorder. The kings of the Bhoi dynasty of Orissa withdrew from Cuttack their old capital and built a new capital at Khurda about 60 km to the south. Though weak and powerless politically, the Bhoi kings received great respect from the people of Orissa, as they were the devotees and hereditary caretakers of Lord Jagannath and as such were quite powerful. Poet Banamali, as his songs indicate, flourished during the reign of Birakishore Dev (1737-93) who ruled over a small part of Orissa with his capital at Khurda.

In 1742 started the struggles for supremacy in eastern India between Raghuji Bhonsle, the Maratha king of Nagpur and Alivardi Khan, the *dewan* of Bengal. According to H. Kulke, 'Orissa was for several years the main theatre of operations and was finally ceded by Alivardi to the Marathas in 1751.'

Birakishore Dev sided the Marathas in their invasion of Orissa and ruled over the land for nearly fifty years till his death in 1793. During the reign of Birakishore the condition of the people of Orissa was good. In this connection, the historian K.N. Mohapatra has rightly observed, "During the reign of Raja Birakishore Dev, the establishment of Maratha rule in the coastal areas of Orissa brought about a notable change. The people of Orissa felt a sense of relief about the temple of Jagannath, the main religious institution of the Hindus, which remained free from any further depredation. A few *mathas* (monasteries) and temples were established. Poets and scholars living in the mathas, temples and under the patronage of the petty ruling chiefs felt secure enough to continue their pursuit of knowledge. Inspite of many adversities and misfortunes of Birakishore, his long reign (1737-93) witnessed the production of a number of useful works both in Sanskrit and Oriya".[4]

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4. *Khurudha Itihas*, K.N. Mohapatra.

During his reign, Dayalu Das, Krupasindhu Das, Sadananda Kavisurya Brahma, Pitambar Das, Rama Das, Maguni Pattanaik, Laxman Mishra, Biswsmbhar Das, Chakrapani Pattanaik, Telenga Gopal, Brajanath Badajena, Abhimanyu Samantsinghar, Dinabandhu Khadanga, Pindika Srichandan, Bhakta Charan Das etc. were the prominent authors. Under the impact of Vaishnavism, they mostly engaged themselves in wiriting religious texts. On the other hand, a few ruling chiefs of this period such as Padmanabha Srichandan, Ghana Bhanja, Krushna Singh also indulged in literary compositions. But they mostly wrote love poems. Songs and lyrics were also profusely produced during the period. Needless to say, our poet Banamali took the lead in composing such songs.

Puri, where Banamali was born, being the centre of Jagannath culture, afforded ample opportunity for the nourishment of his religious belief and creative talent. In those days in Orissa, writings used to be recorded on palm leaf. A bundle of palm leaves was called *pothi*. Many of Banamali's songs written on palm leaves were preserved in *pothis*. But most of his lyrical compositons which were melodious and very popular were preserved in oral form till the fag end of the nineteenth century when their collection was attempted.

Late Damodar Pattanaik, the great connoisseur of Orissan musical compositons, first collected most of the songs of Banamali and included them in his famous anthology, *Sangita Sagara* (The sea of songs) in six volumes. About thirty years after this anthology, a comprehensive volume of songs exclusively of Banamali's composition, appeared in book form in 1934 under the caption *Banamali Padavali*. These songs were collected from the poet's *gadi* (sacred pedestal on which palm leaf books are placed) by Samant Goura Krushna Pattanaik and Babaji Baisnab Das, two illustrious sons of Orissa. These songs on palm leaf were claimed to have been written by the poet Banamali himself. This palm leaf manuscript consisting of about two hundred songs of Banamali was indeed a great discovery. The compilers took the pain of arranging the songs according to Vaishnav chronology. This anthology was highly appreciated by the musicians and music lovers of the state.

During the last fifty years, a few more songs of the poet have also come to light. The efforts of Dr S.K. Mohanty may be mentioned in this connection.

To mention the name of the author at the end of the writing was customary in ancient poetical compositions. Banamali in his songs

has also followed this tradition. But in the colophons of a few of his songs the poet has mentioned the name of Birakishore Dev, Ballabhananda and Sri Charan Das. This throws some light on the time of his poetic compositions. But like all ancient poets, he was indifferent to biographical references. Hence, we are completely in the dark about the life story of this celebrated poet.

Birakishore Dev, as mentioned earlier, was the Gajapati king of Orissa, who ruled the state from 1737 to 1793, during the Maratha rule in Orissa. Hence, it is clear that the poet flourished during the reign of Birakishore Dev. It is also said that the poet presented his twenty-two songs mentioning the name of Birakishore in the colophon and was rewarded twenty-two 'batis' of land (about 440 acres) in return. In one of the poems the poet's reference to king Birakishore as 'Patita' or outcaste is of significance. Ramachandra Dev, father of Birakishore, while he was imprisoned in the Barabati Fort, was forcibly given in marriage to the daughter of the Mohammedan Subedar and was forced to court Islam as a result of which the king, after he was released, forfeited his right to enter the Jagannath temple. It is probably for this reason that the poet has used the epithet 'Patita' to denote his identity, as he was the son of an outcaste father. By this time the idol of Patitapaban was installed in the entrance of the Jagannath temple for those who did not have the right to enter the temple.

The songs of the poet also reveal that during the rule of Birakishore, important festivals such as Chandana Jatra, car festival, Jhulan the daily rituals of Lord Jagannath were duly held ceremoniously.

Suchitra Ramayana, supposed to be the first composition of the poet, has recently come to light and it throws some light on his life. From this, we come to know that his father's name was Hari. He was an humble and ordinary person without a building or riches. He has also mentioned that he was Karan (or Kayastha) by birth and his house was in Dola Mandap Sahi, that lies east of the Jagannath temple. In this work the poet has also praised Birakishore Dev, the then king of Orissa and has mentioned the year of the reign of Birakishore when the said work was completed. According to him it was in the 23rd Anka or 1754 A.D. Assuming the work as being completed when the poet's age was between twenty- five to thirty years, his date of birth can be presumed to be between 1720 and 1730 A.D.

As is inferred from his songs and poems, the poet had his early education in poetry, for in those days poetry and arithmetic

constituted the core of school curriculum. On his own he must have studied various forms of poetry in Sanskrit and Oriya after memorising *Amar Kosa*, the Sanskrit lexicon and grammar. The landmarks in the educational attainments of a child in those days were knowledge of the metrical forms known as *chhanda*, learning of ancient poetical composition and appreciation of the Oriya *Bhagavat* of Jagannath Das, particularly the cantos dealing with the birth of Lord Krushna and *Rāsa Krida* (Rasa Panchadhyaee). He also learnt music for music used to be considered an accomplishment in his social circle. Being devout in nature and attracted to Vaishnav faith, he must have also studied the Vaishnav literature including the songs and lyrics, composed in various *ragas* and *talas* by the Vaishnav poets of Orissa and Bengal.

His parental surname was Pattanaik. Though he came from a poor family he was definitely a lover of music. From *Suchitra Ramayana* we come to know that the work was written on the advice of one Laxman Talichho, probably his teacher in music and a renowned priest of Lord Jagannath who appeared before him in deram. The poet led family life for a considerably long time. But subsequently he gave up his wordly attachments and embraced Vaishnavism and led the life of a *sanyasi*.

The atmosphere of Puri, his birth place and the greatest seat of religion during the period was surcharged with devotion for Lord Jagannath. Banamali's initiation and association with Vaishnav Sadhus had a marvellous effect on him. The fascinating charms of Prema Bhakti brought about a revolutionary change in his life. He derived ethereal pleasure in chantting the names of the Lord and singing His praise loudly. He came to have self-realisation and solace in his life through love of God by realising the futility of pursuing worldly enjoyment. He participated in sankirtan, i.e. loudly singing the names of God in chorus to the accompaniment of musical instruments. He composed songs on the pastimes (*leela*) of Radha-Krushna, the most adorable aspect of God; Lord Krushna's love-play with Radha and the Gopis fascinated his heart and soul.

After formal initiation, on embracing asceticism, he assumed the poetic name, Ballabhananda. That is why in the colophon of a few of his songs the name Ballabhananda has been mentioned. But in none of his songs the name of his Guru occurs. While leading the life of a mendicant, most of the time he was residing in Khajuria matha or Radha Shyama Sundar matha, a Vaishnav monastery in Baseli Sahi on the northern side of the Jagannath temple at Puri. For some years he also helped this institution in its day to day

management and services as an *'adhikari'*. Sricharan Das, the then *mahant* or head of the monastery, was his friend. He was a kind, pious person and was also sympathetic towards the poet. As a token of gratitude and friendship, the poet, instead of mentioning his name in the colophon of a few songs, has mentioned the name of Sricharan Das.

The poet spent most of his days in the sacred town of Puri. Daily he would visit the temple at the appointed hours and would associate himself in the services of the deities. Renouncing family life he was roaming in the streets of the city and was begging alms for his livelihood. Living on alms or *'madhukari'* was the practice of a true sanyasi which meant not to provide for the future and to leave everything to God. Thus the Vaishnav poet Banamali was chanting the name of God all the time and desired nothing except to obtain His bliss.

From internal evidences, it is ascertained that the poet, besides his mother tongue, acquired fair knowledge in Bengali and Sanskrit. A song written according to Sanskrit metre is evidence of his knowledge of Sanskrit.

The exact date of the poet's death is still unknown. Traditionally, it is believed that the poet went on foot to Vrundaban, the holiest place of the Vaishnavas and breathed his last near Gopal Guru temple situated on the bank of Yamuna. He might have composed a few more songs at Vrundaban. But we do not have any record of his last days or his compositions during this period. Notwithstanding the fact that his poems are small in number, they are an immortal treasure of Oriya literature.

IV

His Works: Their Classification

Songs on Rama and Krushna Leela

Banamali has not tried his hand in writing long poems on Krushna Leela, the type of which gained ground in Oriya literature at that time. Nor did he write long poems or *kavyas* on romantic love of princes and princesses on the model of Upendra Bhanja whose writings by that time were also popular. Instead, he has only composed short lyrics or songs on Radha-Krushna *leela* and devotional songs depicting his devotion to and pious yearning for the Lord. Of course, as a lover of music since his young days, he composed some love lyrics before he was attracted towards religious life.

It has been rightly observed that *Suchitra Ramayana* is his first composition. This work, recently discovered, speaks of the poet's mastery over music. In this work he has used 84 *ragas* indicating the names of the eight *talas* according to which they are to be sung.[5] The work consisting of 365 songs is written according to *Ramayana Champu* of Bhojaraja. Champu, according to Sanskrit prosody, is a composition of both prose and poetry. But the poet in this work has not used any prose. Instead of glorifying or seeking the mercy of Rama, he, in the beginning of this work, has paid his respect to Lord Krushna. It seems, by that time he had accepted Lord Krushna as his 'Ista Devata' or Supreme Lord. In all probability, Banamali composed his *Suchitra Ramayana* for the performance of Rama Leela, a form of musical drama which gained popularity in Orissa during his time. These songs are merely adaptation of the Sanskrit work *Rama Champu*.

All his songs are written according to the traditional form of Oriya *chhanda* or *choupadi*. His songs can broadly be categorised into three sections—songs on Rama and Krushna *leela*, devotional songs and love lyrics.

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5. Those eight talas are Ektali, Pahapat, Padi, Adda, Khemata, Jhampa, Sariman, Triputta and Nisari.

The songs on Krushna *leela* or Vaishnav *padavalis*, which are about two hundred in number, are considered to be his original and best creations. The earliest *padavalis* by the Orissan poets were composed in the Vrajaboli language sometime during the 16th century prior to Sri Chaitanya's visit to Orissa. Rai Ramananda, the former Governor of Rajmahendri under the king Prataprudra (1497-1538) was a noted lyricist. He composed powerful lyrics on Krushna's various sports in the Vrajoboli language of which one song is quoted by Krushna Das Kaviraj in his famous work *Chaitanya Charitamruta*. A few ohter poets of this period have also shown their ability in composing such songs in the Vrajaboli language. They prefered Vrajaboli to Oriya probably because the former one was more popular among the Vaishnavas.

In course of time songs on Krushna *leela* in Oriya language came into vogue. During the 18th century interest was renewed in adopting this popular form. The *padavali*-form became so popular that some poets used it while writing on common love themes also.

The political and social condition of Orissa during the period also contributed to the composition and spread of such songs. The musicians introduced such songs in the so-called *darbar* of the local chiefs. Poets used to write songs on the occasions of religious festivals like Ras (Krushna's love-sport) and Jhulana, (swinging festival) and in the popular Kirtan assembles to meet the demand of the folk. Thus the period extending from the last part of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century has rightly been named as the Age of Songs in Oriya literature. In fact during this period Vaishnav lyrics or *padavalis* flourished most in Orissa. Different styles of composition and metrical skills were introduced. The play of poetic imagination enriched *padavali* literature. Among the poets of the period Banamali Das is the first and foremost. Besides, we have a big galaxy consisting of Rama Krushna Pattanaik (18th century), Gopal Krushna Patnaik (1785-1862), Baladev Ratha (1779-1845), Bhubaneswar Kabi Chandra (1768-1814), Somanath Singha (1814-1853), Goura Charan Adhikari (1814-1890), Hanuman Raiguru (1827-1891), Haribandhu Pattanaik (1826-1896), Kishore Chandra Rajendra (1887-1903), Raghunath Parichha, author of *Radhamadhab Vilas, Sangeeta Krushna Leela* (1802-1872), Visvambhar Rajendra, author of *Radha Prema Leela, Krushna Prema Leela* (1856-1895), Shyama Sundar Bhanja, Mangovinda Hota (19th century) who came after Banamali and are credited with extensive lyrical compositions on Krushna Leela.

It may be mentioned here that the *padavali* literature got fillip mostly in the southern part of Orissa. From here the operas on the divine love of Radha and Krushna i.e. Radha Prema Leela and Krushna Prema Leela originated and *padavali* found a different expression through this medium.

Some of the *padavalis* were used to be sung on the festive occasions of *Rāsa* held twice a year: *Basanta Rāsa* during the spring and *Sarada Rāsa* during autumn. A few other *padavalis* were also sung to commemorate the Jhulana. Boys dressed as Radha, Krushna and Sakhi (the lady companion) used to recite these songs to the accompaniment of musical instruments and with appropriate gesticulations. Besides, these songs gradually appeared to be sources of folk entertainment of varied occasions. Folk artists known as *palakar* also used these songs while performing their *pala*. Thus these songs are connected at various stages with socio-religious life of the people.

Though a few Vaishnav lyrics of Orissa were written according to the Bengali metrical pattern of Kirtan songs, the traditional *raga* and *tala* of Orissa dominated. Hence the Vaishnav *padavali* failed to acquire wider dimensions so far as its metrical treatment is concerned. A few Oriya poets have tried their hand in composing songs in Sanskrit metre. But such songs could not gain popularity as their recital demanded certain technical nuances which were absent in Oriya song-pattern. It is curious to observe that some poets of Orissa took a fancy in composing lyrics on Krushna Leela in Bengali. Of them the names of Madhabi Dasi, Pindika Srichandan (18th century), Brajabandhu Singh, Brajanath Badajena (1730-95) and Goura Charan Adhikari (1814-1890) deserve mention. A few poets enthusiastically resorted to a mixed language of Oriya and Bengali to compose similar songs.

Among the compositions intended for Rasa Leela, *Basanta Rasa* of Pindika Srichandan and *Sarada Rasa* of Visvambhar Rajendra and Goura Charan Adhikari were by far the best and most popular in Orissa. It is to be mentioned here that the Oriya padavalis were more or less influenced by the traditional song or *choupadi* compositions of Orissa. A *choupadi* begins with a refrain named as 'ghosa pada' or 'dhruva pada' followed by four or five couplets named 'antara'. The poet mentions his name in the last couplet. Vaishnav *padavalis* have followed this pattern. These are mostly addressed to lady companions. Through this the feelings of love of Radha and Krushna, have been very well presented. Of course a few poems portrary the devotion of *sakhi* towards Radha and Krushna.

We find profuse use of rhetorical devices in the Vaishnav lyrics of Orissa as they were mostly composed during the age of imitation of Sanskrit Reeti Kavya. But the lyrical compositions of Banamali Das are exceptions. These are free from artificiality and subtle rhetorical devices.

The Vaishnav lyrics in general and so also the songs of Banamali can be divided broadly into twenty main divisions based on the treatment of theme of Radha Krushna Leela divisions are given below along with the qualities they stand for.

Prayer to Radha and Krushna *(Bandana)*, the description of the beauty of Radha and Krushna *(Rupasobha)*, the pranks of Krushna in his childhood *(Saisaba Leela)*, the love at first sight between Radha and Krushna *(Navanuaraga)*, the pranks of Krushna at the bathing *ghat* of Yamuna *(Ghata Leela)*, the home coming of Krushna at dusk with cattle and companion *(Godhana Bahuda)*, the hyperbolic expression of praise by Krushna for lightening the mood of anger of Radha *(Chatukti)*, the impatient waiting for the lover *(Birahotkantha)*, veiled love couched in words of anger *(Akshepa-nuraga)*, humourous jesting of the friends of Radha and Krushna regarding their love *(Sakha-Sakhi Parihas)*, the play of colour by Krushna with Radha and her companions *(Holi)*, personal service of Radha and Krushna for the entire day by their companion *(Ashtakala Seva)*, the eight different moods of love of Radha towards Krushna *(Ashtanayika Bhava)*, the union of Radha and Krushna *(Yugala Milana)* etc.

Lyrics which are in the form of addresses by Radha and Krushna to their friends depict their emotions of mutual love and longing. Among the Vaishnav lyrics, those containing hyperbolic expression of praise by Krushna for lightening the mood of anger of Radha far outnumber others.

In Vaishnav lyrics and also in the songs of Banamali, Radha has been depicted as a woman of various moods e.g. as a woman dominating over Krushna *(Swadhina Vartruka)*, as a woman whose feelings are outraged due to the disloyalty of Krushna *(Khandita)*, as a woman who keeps a secret appointment with her lover *(Abhisarika)*, as a repentant woman estranged earlier from her lover *(Kalahantarita)*, as a woman morbid due to the absence of her lover *(Prositavartruka)*, as a woman waiting all organised for her lover *(Basakasajja)*. It can safely be presumed that such depictions of Radha as a woman of various moods are but imitations of the eight types of heroines as mentioned in the rhetorical works of Sanskrit including *Sahitya Darpan* of Viswanath Kaviraj.

Songs of Banamali depict all aspects of Radha Krushna Leela. But he is at his best in delineating the beauty and ecstasy of the first love between Radha and Krushna, which according to Vaishnav terminology, is known as 'Purvaraga' or 'Rupanuraga'. The number of these songs is about one hundred, almost half of his compositions. In these songs, as is customary, the feelings of Radha are mostly depicted. She is enraptured and attracted at the sight of the young, beautiful and bluish Krushna under the Kadamba tree, whose complexion excels the new cloud. To know his identity she asks her lady companion : "Oh my friend, tell me who is he so beautiful standing under the Kadamba tree." In fact Radha is mad with love at the extraordinary beauty of this young adolescent Krushna. Through all her senses she relishes the pleasure of his beauty. Without caring for shame or fear of elderly people she is mad in love for this unknown young person. She even wishes to be his maid-servant (slave). A thrill of joy overpowers her and she wishes his love in return. The poet expresses her desire of union. Hearning the melodious play of the flute of Krushna, her desire for union with him becomes intensified. But her dream is to be materialised only after passing through periods of anguish and uncertainty.

Like other Vaishnav poets, Banamali is also a poet of separation though the number of poems depicting pangs of separation is rather few.

The poet is more devoted to Krushna than to Radha. He has seen no difference between Krushna and Lord Jagannath. For him Krushna being tired of taking milk, curd and cream from Gopis at Vrundaban has come to Puri to savour the rice cooked by Laxmi. The poet is even apprehensive that Krushna may one day leave Shrikshetra that is Puri when he remembers the love of the Gopis.

It may be noted that Banamali has not depicted the love of Radha and Krushna in terms of human love. Here there is no mundane lover and beloved portrayed. The lovers rise to the level of divine consorts and their love as *leela* is a mystic experience.

Devotional songs

The devotional songs written in Oriya are popularly known as *Janana* and *Bhajana*. In *janana* (literally information or representation) the earnest hope and desire of the devotee is conveyed along with references to the divine and supernatural qualities of God or the deities worshipped. On the other hand, in *bhajana* (literally recounting or devotion), a description of the form and a recounting

of the qualities and activities of the deities are generally given. While *jananas* are addressed to the divine being *bhajanas* are addressed to one's conscience. Both the types of devotional songs are found in the composition of Banamali.

The spread of Vaishnavism in Orissa during the sixteenth century created an unprecedented spate of jananas and bhajanas. These devotional songs are written in the folk language instead of Sanskrit. The five religious poets of this century, Jagannath Das, Balaram Das, Ananta Das, Achyutananda Das and Jasobant Das, popularly known as 'Pancha Sakha' were the foremost among the writers of devotional poems. Subsequently the form of writing devotional poems was immensely enriched. Among the authors of devotional poetry of the post - Pancha Sakha period, the names of two poets deserve special mention. They were the Mohammedan poet Salabeg and Banamali Das. It is certain that, Salabeg, though a great devotee of Krushna and Jagannath, was not formally initiated to Vaishnavism. Besides, we do not have any record of his domestic life. Whether he was married or not is not yet known. His songs throw no light on this aspect. But Banamali certainly led a family life before he was initiated. In many of his songs he has mentioned about his misery in maintaining his family. Besides, before his initiation he had written a few love songs. This presupposes his love experience in a family set-up.

Devotional songs of Banamali are not too many in number. Only about fifty songs of him have so far come to light. Though a few in number, some of them are still popular and are sung widely. His devotional songs mostly centre round Lord Jagannath and Lord Krushna. It seems he was mostly attached to Lord Jagannath and has composed highly appealing devotional songs on him. To him Jagannath is 'Poorna Brahma', Krushna and Rama are but his manifestations or 'Avatars'. He has also composed songs on the Chandan, Jhulan and Holi festivals of Lord Jagannath and Krushna.

He has expressed his earnest desire to spend his last days in the sacred place, Puri and wished to visit the temple to behold and view the Lord daily and to participate in his services. From these songs we can to some extent gather a few facts about his personal life of two different phases i.e. before he took up Sannyas and thereafter. In one of his songs written before his Sannyas, he has expressed his personal misery—the pitiable condition in which he was living. He lived in abject poverty and was constantly in debt passing his days among the members of his family who were disgrunteed and quarrelling constantly among themselves. As a result of this his mind was in turmoil and he failed to concentrate

on the Lord. It seems, for this reason in one song he has mentioned the cruelty of Vishnu in his different incarnations.

But after he renounced his family, the tone of his prayer to God changed completely. He did not wish for money or dress nor for happiness in family life. Instead he wanted to have nothing, neither food nor clothing, but only a piece of bark around his loin.

Among all the five important deities of the Hindu pantheon, Ganesh, Vishnu, Rudra (Siva), Ambika and Bhaskar, he dedicated himself to Lord Jagannath. This he has admitted in one of his songs. To him Jagannath and Rama are indentical and the same. Most of his songs were written while he was residing at Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannath. Hence he says, his Lord who heard the cry of the elephant from a long distance, and saved him against the attacking crocodile, is at present turning a deaf ear to his prayers, though he is in great distress and is staying so near him. He has also paid due respect to Balaram, the elder brother of Lord Jagannath or Krushna.

The type of distress he underwent or the sin he committed has not, however, been clearly expressed in his songs. In one song he has described the different names of Krushna, such as Keshava, Hari, Upendra, Daityari (destroyer of demons), the lotus-eyed Lord who plays in the bower or *kunja,* Govinda, son of Nanda, Basudeva, friend of cowherd boys, killer of the demon named Baka, glory of the Yadu dynasty, saviour of the world, Sarangadhar, the formless, destroyer of the demon Mura, the friend of Sugriva and Sudama Mali, Vishnu, Paramananda, Adikanda, the king of gods, the beggar at Bali's door step, he who cured and made the hunch-backed Kubja beautiful; he who wears the feather of the peacock on his head, spends time with cows, plays flute under the Kadamba tree; the bestower of bliss and the dweller in *Nityasthala.* Banamali always remembers his Lord having all these attributes.

The devotional poems known as *Prabhata Abakash* in Oriya are usually sung in the morning. These songs are akin to songs known as 'Prabhati' in Hindi. In these types of songs, Lord Krushna or Rama or Jagannath is addressed by their mother to wake up in the morning and perform their morning duties.

Banamali in one such poem describes the attitude of Yasoda, mother of Krushna, in the morning. She tenderly addresses her two sons to wake up soon. She allures them by saying that she has kept in readiness many sweets, ripe fruits and butter for their repast and has prepared their food of curd and rice which they will

take with them to the field while they will go to tend the cows. She also implores them not to delay in going to the field.

In his famous and most popular song, which the poet wrote after his renunciation, he expresses his desire before Jagannath thus:

Jagannatha Ho'! Kichhi magunahin tote,
Dhana magunahin, Jana magunahin
Maguchhi saradha baliru hate

(O Jagannath! nothing do I seek from you,
Neither money nor men, but only a cubit of land on the sands you love.)

'From this sacred sand on which your car moves,' the poet goes on, 'I should see your temple. My eyes do cherish to see nothing save and except a glimpse of yours. My ears are eager to hear nothing except your 'leela' (pastimes). My tongue wants not to sing songs on worldly affairs but only to recite your name. Oh my lord! let not my nose be satisfied with the smell of different perfumes but seek the aroma of your used garland, sandal paste and camphor. Let the fingers of my hand only tell your name 'Hare Krushna' with the rolling of beads and my feet only take me to places of pilgrimage sanctified by you.'

In another song the poet prays to God expressing his desire as follows: O Lord this is my cherished desire : Let my mind be engaged always in the contemplation of your image, and my days be spent in begging alms at Srikshetra while witnessing your thirteen festivals held round the twelve months, and in joyfully chanting the name 'Hare Krushna, Hare Rama' with pleasure in the company of Sadhus. To lead such a life, the poet says, he has cut off his family ties.

It is certain that these two poems were written after the poet left his home and accepted the life of a Vaishnav Sanyasi. Of course in some of his songs he has also expressed his desire, like a Gaudiya Vaishnav, to go to Vrajadham and worship in the form of a lady attendant of Shree Radha.

His four songs written about the Chandan festival of Lord Jagannath held in the month of Vaisakh (May-June) for twenty one days, are still sung by the people during the festival. These songs depict vividly the religious customs practised particularly during the festival. During this time Madan Mohan (representing Lord Jagannath out of doors) is taken on a wooden chariot carried by *sevakas* to a big tank named Narendra Sarobar situated at a distance of two km from the main temple amidst the crowd of

spectators and devotees singing prayers. This festive occasion is marked with the play of musical instruments such as cymbals, trumpet, madal, etc.

The idols are placed on the boats and after the boat has plied for several rounds in the tank the deities return to the main temple with ceremony. In this festival *devadasis* (women dancers dedicated to the service of the Lord) used to dance before the lord while the boat moved on the water and the chariot was carried on the road.

The poet has also written songs on Jhulan (swing festival) and Holi. These festivals are held during the rains on Sravana Purnima and during the spring on the full moon day of Falguna (March-April) respectively.

As a true Vaishnav he has also expressed his deep respect and dedication to his Guru (spiritual master) and respect for Vaishnav community. To attain the spiritual bliss, he wanted to give up his senses of pride, shame, ego and sensitiveness. He desired to realise God who is present every where, both in animate and inanimate objects.

Though the poet preferred to live on alms, he has expressed his discomfort for this in one of his songs. While describing his plight, he says, 'I am ashamed to beg before the unworthy persons.' In this connection, he has mentioned the nature of *Mahantas* (Head of the monasteries) of his time who were egoistic, proud and were leading irreligious life paying no regards to true Vaishnavas.

Thus the devotional songs of the poet composed in a simple and straight forward manner speak of his personality, his devotion and piety.

Love songs

As has been said before, prior to his initiation as a Vaishnava, Banamali wrote a number of love songs depicting the feelings of the lover and the beloved. Unfortunately most of these songs are lost to us because of the lack of interest of the author who, after his initiation, considered human love as mere illusion—a transitory affair without any significance. However, a dozen of such songs are collected and appended to his works as *Gramya Rasa* (Rustic sentiments) which centre round love from a sentimental point of view. These songs are an illustration of his wit, good humour, aesthetic sense, artistic skill and creativity of a high order.

Prior to Banamali amorous poems and songs were also in vogue in Oriya. The poets were engaged in such compositions in order to please the petty rulers and landlords indulging in idleness, luxury and amorous living after the loss of their independence. These songs used to be sung in social gatherings for the entertainment of the common people. Such type of songs written by the poets, Dhananjay Bhanja, Upendra Bhanja, Nrushingha Pattanaik etc. had earned popularity. Probably, being influenced by the taste of the period, Banamali in his youth composed a number of such songs of which only a few have survived. These songs mostly depict the pangs of separation of the lover and the beloved and their delicate emotions.

A few songs depict the lover's praise for the beauty of his lady love to appease her pretended anger. In one poem the poet, while describing the breast of his beloved, makes use of the conceit that she has stolen two round caskets and concealed them close to her chest under the cover of her fine *sari*. In another poem he has compared his lady love to a hero properly dressed and ready to go for fighting a dual contest. Another poem depicts the ecstatic pleasure the lover experiences while physically united with his lady love. In one song the poet has depicted the delicately charming appearance of his lady love when she becomes bashful. In a poem the lover, while taking leave of his beloved, requests her not to forget the sweet memories. So also is the case of the husband. When he is away from his beloved, he remembers the pleasant memories of their union and pines fot it. It may be noted that Banamali does not differentiate between the lover and the loving husband, both of whom are treated as lovers.

The poet has also delineated in his songs the sentiment of the beloved. When the husband is preparing to go to a distant place, the wife is imploring him not to leave her as Spring, the beautiful season for lover's union, is approaching. At this the husband consoles her by saying that he will not forget to return before the rains. Two songs of the poet also reveal the pangs of separation of the wife from her husband which she has described before her lady friend.

In one poem the lady friend of a wife says that the latter's husband, only seven days after his return, is again contemplating to go to a distant place. On hearing this the wife's sorrow knows no bounds. Thus these commonplace events of everyday life have found expression through these love songs.

These songs are written according to the traditional form of *choupadi* except one whose structure is unique. It has been composed according to the alphabetic order of the Oriya consonants, a form of writing popularly known as *chautisa,* which literally means 'relating to thirty-four'. Now in the Oriya alphabet there are in all thirty-four consonants beginning with 'ka' (क) and arranged in a sequence ending in 'ksha' (क्ष). In the medieval age there evolved a tradition of composing poems in thirty-four couplets or verses, each couplet or verse beginning with a letter of the alphabet so that the series of the thirty-four couplets or verses employ as initial letters the entire gamut of the thirty-four consonants of the alphabet in their order of sequence. Here it is important to note that the *chautisa* form is highly suitable for memorising since the letters serve as a cue to facilitate the reciter's remembrance of the lines in proper sequence.

Usually the *chautisas* are composed following the sequence of consonants at the beginning of every line from 'ka' to 'ksha'. For sake of variety the alphabetic sequence in some poems is also maintained at the end of line. Some *chautisas* were also composed following the sequence of consonants in the reverse order in which the poem starts with 'ksha' and ends with 'ka' at the beginning of each line. It is known as *olata chautisa*. The alphabetic order of 'ka' to 'ksha' sequence in the beginning of each line and the reverse order at the end of the line are also presented in some *chautisas*. Some *chautisas* are known as *mesha yuddha Chautisa.'* This is different in its technique as the last consonant is placed after the first and the 33rd consonant is placed after the second consonant. Using many novel metres and techniques through this poetic form the poets of ancient and mediaeval periods achieved a great success. Dinakrushna Das, Upendra Bhanja, Bhima Bhoi, Shymaghana etc. are some of the notable poets who used this form most successfully.

It seems the poet Banamali has tried his hand in writing a few *chautisas* which have not yet come to light. But the available one is a novel attempt of the poet exhibiting his skill and command of using words. This is regarded as the smallest *chautisa* written in Oriya and it is intended to be sung. The poem is unique insofar as it employs the thirty-four consonants in alphabetic sequence, each consonant as the initial letter of each word. In other words the poem starts with a word beginning with 'ka' and consequently maintains the alphabetic sequence in every word the poet uses. Thus using the thirty-four words in alphabetic order the poet gives a complete idea he wants to convey. In this song he describes the

beauty of his lady love who is adept in artistic work, whose eyes are like *khanjana*, whose sides are heavy, whose hair is black like cloud, whose complexion resembles the *champak* flower, whose thighs are beautiful, who knows the art of reciting kavyas, who smells like lotus etc. In this way he goes on to describe the charm and delicateness of the beloved: her lips radiant like the sun, movements slow and majestic and smile most intelligent. She is soft like a flower permeating love.

Thus the love songs of the poet, though small in number, speak of the romantic sensibility, aesthetic sense and artistic skill of a genuine medieval poet.

V
Language, style and philosophy of life

During the medieval period many poets composed songs to please their masters, the kings or land-lords, and they made copious use of verbal jugglery in the name of style with an eye to impress their noble audience. But Banamali did not compose songs to please any kings or courtiers. As such, his songs are free from all sorts of artificiality and ornamental devices, which were the fashion of the day. They are but an expression of his inner feelings and religious conviction. Spontaneously they have come out of his heart through the simplest language possible. Considering this he has no equal in the field of musical composition in Oriya. Most effectively and forcefully he has used the simple and colloquial Oriya language and has brought dignity to it.

In fact the excellence of his songs lies in the use of befitting words culled out from the common speech. The language of his songs can be compared with that of the *ashtopadis* of Jayadeva in Sanskrit and of the long poem *Rasakallol* of Deenakrushna Das in Oriya. Lucidity of expression has made his ideas transparent and crystal clear. Hence the reader or listener of his songs never faces any difficulty to understand their meaning.

Due to Mughal administratioin established in Orissa for more than a century, prior to the time of Banamali, it is quite natural that a good number of foreign words known as *Yavanik* i.e. of Arabic, Persian and Urdu origin had crept into the Oriya language. Use of a few such words is also found in Banamali's songs. The poet has preferred them to their equivalent of Sanskrit origin not only for the exotic sense they carried in his time but also for the sound value. They are : *puccā, dakayat, harkat, hurmat, hakāri, pyāri, tyāri, hāzar, nazar, juhār, kunhā, māf, tājib, nasib*, etc.

Unlike the contemporary compositions, Banamali's songs do not speak of the love experience of princes and princesses. On the other hand his songs portray the eternal aspiration of the human soul for a novel and unique spiritual experience deeply realised by himself. Like all Vaishnav lyrictists he has painted the divine love of

Radha and Krushna in terms of human love. In particular, his songs on the first love *(navanuraga)* of Radha are superb creations. The blossom of the first love in a maiden with her modesty and shyness is beautifully expressed through the songs of Radha and her *sakhis*. Banamali will be ever remembered as the immortal poet of *navanuraga* in Oriya literature. It can unhesitatingly be said that Banamali is the first and the foremost Vaishnav lyricist and devotional Oriya poet of the eighteenth century.

It has been said earlier that the poet in his songs did not wish to speak of his social commitments or social experiences. In spite of this his songs present some reflections of the then society. During his time the daily services of Lord Jagannath were performed regularly and ceremoniously. Particularly the festivals like *Chandan, Jhulan* and *Holi* were held with due pomp and grandeur. Tantric practices and casting spells by using *mantras* were prevalent in society. Ladies were accustomed to sing and play with *vina*. Some were expert in interlarding their conversation with riddles and charades *(dhag* and *dhamali)* and were adept in painting portraits. Ladies were observing religious vows to attain their cherished objects in return. Some were observing *jagar*, spending the whole night without sleep and concentrating on the deity with lamps kept continuously burning before them. Turmeric, sandal paste and *chuā* (a country made perfume) were used as cosmetics. They were using different ornaments such as *jhuntiā* and *nupura* etc. Bow and arrow were mostly used while fighting. Elephants were caught carefully from the hilly tracts; birds were caught with the help of a stick coated with bird-lime, joined on end with similar sticks to reach the desired height. *Cowrees* were used as coin. During the month of *Sravan* (July-August) people were facing the danger of inundation. People used to take betel for pleasure. Smoking hemp was considered as addiction and condemned.

In most of his prayers the poet has addressed his Lord as the Saviour who removed poverty *(Daridrya bhanjan)*, redeemed the afflicted *(Arta-trana)*, helped to tide over all adversities *(Bipattipati)*. His prayer is sincere and aimed at dispelling the gloom of all calamity. Of course he has not clearly mentioned the exact nature of the calamity. It can be presumed that it was not the individual calamity pertaining to domestic crisis, but it was the calamity affecting the community as a whole such as oppression, anarchy and scarcity of food which prevailed during the Maratha rule in Orissa.

As discussed before, the poet has shown his masterly skill in the use of words, particularly the colloquial words. Besides, to make

his songs more rhythmic, the poet has carefully used alliteration *(anuprasa* and *yamaka)*. He has also used other figures of speech such as simile *(upama)*, metaphor *(rupaka)*, utpreksha etc. to convey his ideas effectively and forcefully. The poet, as he composed his songs during the age of *Reeti* in Oriya literature, could not but use them wittingly or unwittingly.

While composing songs with alphabetic sequence, the use of both vowels and consonants speaks of his mastery over the rhythmic use of words. His similes and mataphors are apt, suggestive and have added freshness in the conveying of ideas. In one of his songs he has compared different aspects of love with a knife well-sharpened, a slippery road, a fire in the wood during summer, the baited hook of the angle for catching fish, a tying rope, the pincers of the blacksmith, the rising of the river during the rains etc. While describing the cloud of the rainy season he has beautifully compared it with a venomous snake whose tongue is the lightning. He has compared the tearful eyes of the beloved with those of a fish shedding pearls.

As is the convention Krushna is compared with the newly formed cloud of the rainy season, but the expressions are striking. Describing the pale countenance of Radha the poet, through the mouth of her companion, says : 'You appear like a lotus devoid of its pollen'. Describing the pale face of Radha while she was sitting in a pensive mood due to separation, resting her forehead on her left hand, the poet presumes that the moon is now at the verge of setting.

The poet as a musician himself has profusely used different *ragas* and *talas* in his musical compositions. In this connection, it may be noted that the tradition in the field of music in Orissa is very ancient and shows evidence of assimilation of both northern and southern musical patterns of India. The ancient temples of Orissa such as the Sun temple of Konark and the Jagannath temple of Puri depict in architecture the figures of musicians playing on different musical instruments.

From the written sources we find two types of musical compositions. The type of compositions such as the long narrative poems were used to be sung in ancient and medieval periods. These of course were simpler and were called *chhanda brutta*. The other type, comprising short lyrical compositions and meant to be sung, were composed according to traditional *ragas* and *talas*. Banamali has used more than sixty types of *ragas* in his songs. He

has successfully used a few of the *chhanda bruttas* and have set them to suitable *talas*[6].

Among these ragas some are of mixed category as they are derived out of the combination of two *ragas*. This is particularly found in the case of *kedar* and *kamodi*.[7]

He has used ten *talas* in his songs. They are—*jhula, aratali, ekttali, pahapat, adi, sariman, triputa, padi, khemata and jhampa*. Of these *talas* his most favourite was *jhula* which he has used profusely in about fifty songs.

In these songs are to be found the philosophical outlook of the poet, his attitude towards life as a Vaishnav, the mode of worship he practised according to the cult of Prema Bhakti, and his devotion. As the religious belief of the poet as is evident in these songs is an assimilation of the traditional worship of Lord Jagannath and the preachings of Sri Chaitanya, Banamali has accepted both Shrikshetra (Puri) and Vrundavan as the abode of peace and *Nityasthala*. He viewed Lord Jagannath as the source of different incarnations of Vishnu. It may be noted that according to Gaudiya faith Lord Krushna is the source of all incarnations. Hence it can be said that Banamali was not a conservative Gaudiya Vaishnav. He accepted the Chaitanya faith in a modified form which in course of time gained ground in Orissa. The eleven songs in particular, composed by the poet as an address to his mind or self, categorised as *Mana Siksha* (Instruction to self or admonition to self) clearly reflect his philosophy of life.

After his initiation into Vaishnavism the world appeared to him as illusion. Considering death to be the ultimate end of life he wanted to be fortified by piety, free from vanity and egoism. For attaining the spiritual or divine life he forsook his worldly attachments, his relationship with wife, children, friend and family members. He showed his aversion to the love songs which were so dear to him in the prime of his youth. Attachment to and desire for wealth or property, he realised, ultimately led to despair and dissatisfaction in life. Renunciation of worldly enjoyment and leading the life of a Vaishnav devotee became his ideal. Completely dedicating himself

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6. These *bruttas* are *sanakara bharana, munibara, bangalashree, asadha-sukla* and *mangalabaradi* etc.
7. In the *kedar* group we find—*kedar-chakra keli, mangal-kedar, mohan-kedar, rasa-kedar, krushna-kedar, kusum-kedar, kumbha-kedar, chakra-kedar, kedar-gouda, basant-kedar*. In the *kamodi* group we find - *sindhu kamodi, mumbha-kamodi, lalit-kamodi, soka-kamodi, dakhina-kamodi.*

to the will of God, he did not bother for food or clothing, being confident that God would take care of him and provide for his living.

Banamali in practice strictly followed the ideals of a true devotee as described in the *Bhagavat*. According to the *Bhagavat* nine rules of conduct are prescribed for the promotion of devotion to and love for Krushna.

They are :
(1) Hearing the names of God chanted or sung by others.
(2) Chanting or singing His names.
(3) Remembering or thinking of his names, charms etc.
(4) Showing respect to Krushna by visiting the sacred places associated with his pastimes.
(5) Worship of Krushna in images by offering flowers, sandal paste, food etc.
(6) Bowing down before Krushna or his image at the place of worship.
(7) Serving Krushna in the attitude of a devoted servant.
(8) Comradeship : to think that one is his loving and intimate friend and to behave towards him accordingly, generally through his images.
(9) Resignation : devoting oneself entirely to His services.

Paying due respect to *guru,* his spiritual master, and *sadhus* (saintly persons) he wanted to pass his days.in realising the ecstasy of divine love *(aprakruta prema).* However, a few technical terms used in the tenets of Gaudiya sect of Vaishnavas are also found in his songs such as *ujjal rasa, mohajana, ashta sakhi* of Radha etc. This clearly indicates his inclination towards the Chaitanya faith for which he left for Vrundavan in his ripe old age. In fact the goal of a Vaishnava of the Chaitanya school is to serve Krushna at Vrundaban. In this connection, obseivations of Dr R.G. Nath, an eminent scholar of Gaudiya school, is noteworthy : "If he desires to serve him in collaboration with the *gopis,* he will be there as a young *gopi* and an attendant of Radha; and his work there will be to help in the love-pastimes of Krushna with Radha and her confidants. If a Vaishnava likes to serve Krushna along with His *sakhas* (comrades), he will assume the spiritual form of a *sakha,* and so on. But how to attain such a form suitable for one's desired services? It can be achieved by thought, meditation or remembrance of Krushna in his *leela* with the associates of one's desired group, and by keeping oneself, in imagination, engaged in suitable services in their midst.

The Chaitanya school enjoin that if a person wishes to serve Krushna at Vrundavana with *madhura rati*, he should always think that he is a young *gopi*, beautifully dressed, attending on Radha in her love-pastimes with Krushna, being principally subordinate to Rupamanjari, the chief of Radha's attendants known as *manjaris*. Similar is the mode of meditation for devotees with other *ratis*."[8]

To realise this state, in all probability, Banamali spent his last days at Vrundavan. To him God, the lord of the world is omnipresent, omniscient, though hidden to the physical eye. He is eternally present and perfect in bliss. He is attractive to everybody and is ever kind to devotees. One can behold Him through his divine vision. He can be realised through love and complete dedication of the body and soul. Renouncing the world and chanting loudly the name Hari will save a person from all dangers. The poet in his earlier poems has also advised others to pray to *chaturdha murti*—Jagannath, Balabhadra, Ṣubhadra and Sudarsan, seated on the sacred pedestal in the Jagannath temple.

He expressed his desire to serve Lord Jagannath every day being present in the temple from the period of *mangal arati* early in the morning till his last decoration (*besha*) named '*badasinhara*' held late at night. He cherished the desire to die in full possession of his senses while uttering the name of Jagannath and with leaves of *tulasi* and worn out garlands of the Lord in his mouth. We may presume that the poet had such a peaceful death at Vrundavan.

8. 'A survey of the Chaitanya movement'- R.G. Nath, *The Cultural Heritage of India* Vol. I, P 144.

VI
Characters

According to Vaishnav philosophy, Lord Krushna can be attained through five different *bhavas* or sentiments such as tranquility (*sauta*), servitude (*dasya*), friendship (sakhya), filial affection (*vat-salya*) and amour (*madhura*). Hence, in Vaishnav lyrics five types of characters are found representing the sentiments they stand for. Of these sentiments the amorous sentiment centering round Radha, Krushna and the *gopis* is regarded as the best. Hence, in Vaishnav lyrics, these characters connected with the amorous sentiment have played the prominent part.

The main characters of the Vaishnav lyrics being Radha and Krushna, Banamali has portrayed them with utmost care. Besides, to enhance their *leela* or sport, a few other characters such as Nanda, the king of Gopa, Yasoda and Rohini, his consorts, their elder son Balaram, Radha's husband Chandrasena, her mother-in-law Jatila, sister-in-law Kutila, her lady companions such as Lalita, Visakha etc. and the friends of Krushna such as Subala. Sudam, Madhumangal have been introduced. But they have been treated insignificantly as compared to Radha, Krushna, Chandravali and Lalita.

Krushna, the hero :

Krushna is the only hero depicted in these songs. Being regarded as *rasaraja* (supreme embodiment of all the sentiments), he is described both as a husband and a lover. According to Rupa Goswami, the great exponent of the Gaudiya sect, the ladies of Gopapura are Krushna's consorts in his *nitya leela*. But they appear to be '*parakiya*' to fulfil the *leela* of Krushna. Lord Krushna, the hero of the *padavalis*, is endowed with six divine traits or *aiswaryas*. He is almighty himself. None in this earth can be compared to him, with regard to form and quality. He is beyond comparison. He attracts everybody. He is the embodiment of all beauty, wealth, power and arts. Banamali in his songs has also conceived and described Krushna with these attributes. In a few poems he has

focussed on Yasoda showing Krushna as her son. Krushna, at Vrundaban is always adolescent, about tweleve or thirteen years of age. Yet, to Yasoda he appears quite different, only as an innocent, tender and even helpless child. But to the *gopis* he appears as a jestful and playful young man full of pranks.

The picture of Krushna, as an amorous suitor in the Vaishnav *padavalis* is unique and inexpressibly charming. He wears clothes of yellow colour; a garland of wild flowers hangs round his neck and flower bracelets adorn his wrists. To his tuft of hair is tied a dazzling peacock feather, his forehead and cheeks are painted with artistic designs of sandal paste and *gorachana,* on his chest sparkles the rarest jewel *kaustubha* mani; round his waist is the jingling girdle *kinkini* and round the ankles are the ringing anklets called *nupura.* Holding his flute in one hand he smiles gently, a mystic smile or he puts the flute to his lips and plays on it gently. Banamali is the worshipper of this image of Krushna. His poem which begins with

Jaya he vrajaraja nandana
Mohana natabara vangiya

(Glory to thee, O son of the king of Vraja enrapturing all by the pose of a superb dancer)

gives a detailed account of Krushna's physical beauty, his dress and qualities, his unearthly charms which are responsible for the mental distraction of Radha. In fact, so marvellously beautiful does he look in his dress, appearance and qualities that all the *gopis* are attracted towards him uncontrollably. In another poem Radha implores Krushna not to put on such apparel, for that will show him as heart-breakingly handsome and all self-control of the *gopis* will be reduced to naught before such charm. Making use of a poetic conceit, Banamali appeals to Krushna, the embodiment of perfect beauty not to use any more of earthly decorations to enrich his lovely form. Thus begins the poem :

O, amorous Shyama, do not put on
such apparel
When you dress like this
The stone gets melted;
What to speak of a tender-hearted maiden!

Then in successive stanzas the poet entreats his lord how, if he at all exercises any charm, he should not use them in full :

Hold that charming flute if you shall,
Do not, O dear, put it to your lips;
If you are bent on kissing it
Do not, O cruel, blow on it.

The sentiment is that of the completely overpowered maiden unable to withstand further infatuation. In another poem the poet begins with an indication of Radha's reaction on witnessing the exquisite loveliness of Krushna :

Ki dekhila aja netra sajani
Ki dekhila aja netra
Lalita murati kalita nohila
dalita anjana gatra
Alaka kapale chapala ki khele
kekipuchha chandra chula
Ratane jadita jatane kundala
jhalake ganda mandala.

What have my eyes beheld today, O dear,
what have they!
What lovely form unfathomable,
complexion as of collyrium finely blended
The ringed peacock feather plays the lightning
above the curl-fringed forehead;
The round cheeks gleaming under
earrings artistically bejewelled

(Tr. T. Misra)

Fine, as the description in translation is, the felicity of diction, the repetitive sound pattern, the lilt and the rhythm of the lines are incomparably evocative of the loveliness when musically rendered.

Krushna in these songs in various stages has been depicted differently. According to Sanskrit rhetoric he can be characterised as *anukula, dakshina, satha* and *dhrusta nayaka*. He is regarded *anukula nayaka* as he is solely dedicated to Radha inspite of his having many lady loves. He possesses the qualities of a *dakshina nayaka* when after spending the night with Chandravali and having the signs of enjoyment on his body, he returns to Radha and implores her to pardon his fault. This shows his deep love for Radha, the characteristic of *dakshina nayaka*. As a *satha* and *dhrusta nayaka* inspite of clear evidences of enjoyment on his body he tells lies to pretend innocence before Radha. Banamali has depicted Krushna in all these aspects with artistic originality.

Radha, the heroine :

Radha has been painted as the heroine in these songs. Among the cowherd maids attached to Krushna, she stands supreme as the most beloved one. Since she was not married to Krushna and

was the wife of Chandrasena, her love for Krushna is considered unsocial. Hence she has been termed as *parakiya*. So also is the love of Chandravali, wife of Gobardhana malla.

The love of Radha and Krushna is receiprocal. Considering the beauty, virtue and intensity of love she is the best among the cowherd maids. She is incomparable in every respect. Her beauty has no par on earth. She has been painted as ever maidenly and young (*nava youvana*), the embodiment of *alhadini sakti* (the pleasure giving force) of Lord Krushna and represents *mahabhava* (the supreme sentiment) as propounded by theoreticians of the Gaudiya school.

Banamali, who was influenced by the Gaudiya school, has described Radha after this tradition. She is the daughter of Vrushabhanu, the king of Jabat in Gopapura and her mother was Kirtida. Hence Radha is described as *Vrushabhanaja, Kirtida-suta* etc. She is afraid of Chandrasena, her husband, to whom she has been given in marriage and Jatila, her mother-in-law, and Kutila, her sister-in-law. Radha is always in constant anxiety for her deep love of Krushna. Her lady companions from time to time add fuel to the fire by reminding her about the disastrous consequences of her unsocial love. She also feels pain for her love in secret and condemns herself and her love for Krushna who is her nephew in social relationship. In one song Banamali has referred to Radha as a bride arrived for consummation—a distinct reference to the local customs prevalent in those days of performing the consummation ceremony sometime after the marriage.

Following the traditions of Sanskrit rhetoric, Radha in Vaishnav lyrics and particularly in the songs of Banamali has been painted in eight fold manner (*ashta nayika*) such as *abhisarika, vasaksajja, utkanthita, vipralabdha, khandita, kalahantarita, proshitvartruka, swadhinabhartruka*. A few lines may be added here about how Radha has been painted as *ashta nayika* by Banamali.

Abhisarika

In a song Banamali depicts Radha in the following manner : Unaccustomed as she is, Radha gets bewildered when she goes to meet Krushna secretly in her love tryst. Hence she requests one of her lady companions to go with her to the appointed place to meet Krushna.

Vasaksajja

She adorns herself with dress and ornaments and decorates her bower to welcome her lover for a happy union. Banamali in his

poem *sakhi go mera puraku aja* (My friend! today my lover comes to my bower) has nicely portrayed the sentiment of Radha eagerly awaiting her lover and anticipating a loving reception that may satisfy him.

Utkanthita or Birahotkanthita :

Krushna has promised to meet Radha for which she waits with intense expectation. But ultimately Krushna fails to come and the poor lady is disappointed.

Vipralabdha :

She, not being able to meet Krushna, her lover, becomes extremely sensitive, more so than *utkanthita,* feels insulted, gets angry and wishes to commit sucide.

Khandita :

Radha, after waiting the whole night for Krushna, was utterly disappointed and was furious when she saw Krushna approaching her in the morning with clear evidences of enjoyment with a different lady on his appearance and dress. Six songs depicting the attitude of Radha as *khandita* have come to light. In one of the songs, written in poetic dialogue between Krushna and Radha, Krushna attributes false reasons for his absence and the marked appearance of sex indulgence.

Kalahantarita :

Four songs of Banamali depicting Radha as *kalahantarita* have come to light. In one song Radha refuses to meet and says good bye to Krushna and after he departs repents for her harsh behaviour.

Proshitabhartruka :

In this type of song the poet depicts the pathetic condition of Radha or the *gopis* when Krushna is out of their sight, has gone away either to the forest or to Mathura. Twelve songs of Banamali depicting their lamentation have come to light. In them Radha and the *gopis* are recounting the past activities of Krushna and pining for reunion.

Swadhinabhartruka :

Radha feels conceited when she realises that Krushna, her lover, is under her control. She feels complacent after union with Krushna and playfully entreats him to decorate her properly.

Chandravali :

The character Chandravali is the creation of Rupa Goswami as a contrast and compliment to the character of Radha. In the songs of Banamali the name of Chandravali has been mentioned at several places. But we do not find her performing any function. Definitely she was a beloved of Krushna and is a contestant of Radha in respect of love sport with Krushna. Radha is always envious of her. In one song she says 'Oh Krushna, go to Chandravali's residence. Do not show your face after spending the night with her. You may, if you like, show your pretence to her'. Thus using harsh words she condemns Krushna.

Sakhi (Lady companion) and Duti (Lady messenger)

In the Vaishnav lyrics *sakhi* plays a very prominent role. According to the Vaishnav philosopher, there lies difference in *gopi bhava* and *sakhi bhava.* In Banamali's poems no particular *sakhi* has been identified. As a community or group they have taken part in the love sport of Krushna, adding beauty and charm to it. As a class they have vexed, consoled and advised Radha and have tried to bring about a happy union between her and Krushna for the purpose of which they have acted as messengers. Among the *sakhis* of Radha, eight companions categorised as *paramprestha* according to *Ujjval Nilamani* of Rupa Goswamy, are the best. They are Lalita, Visakha, Chitra, Champak Latika, Tunga Vidya, Indurekha, Ranga Devi, Sri Devi.

Rupa Goswami has elaborately discussed the functions of the *sakhis* which are followed by our poet Banamali in his songs. These are :

1) Recounting of attributes (*Guna kirtan*)

With an intention to attract Radha towards Krushna the *sakhi* describes the beauty and other attractive qualities of Krushna before Radha. In one song she says 'O my friend! look at the boy who is holding the flute, etc.'

2) Creating attachment

The *sakhi* takes necessary steps to develop the seed of love between Radha and Krushna. Banamali assumes the position of a *sakhi* and addresses Radha : "The beautiful dress of Krushna is but to attract you". Other functions of the *sakhis* are to help in the matter of love tryst, offering Radha to Krushna for union, jests *(parihas)*, giving solace *(aswas pradan)* to both Radha and Krushna,

expressing the hidden feeling of love, clothing and ornamentation *(vesa vinyas)*, hiding the fault *(dosha gopan)*, giving necessary instruction in the art of love-making, beginning from love at first sight till the union, causing union, serving *(seva)*, rebuking *(tiraskar)*, sending message, effort for saving the life of the beloved when her condition was serious due to separation.

Among the *sakhis*, Lalita is supreme and the best promoter of this divine love sport. In other words she is the pivot or *sutradhara* of this love drama. Banamali has mentioned the name of eight *sakhis* and the part they played during the observance of *Rasa*. Without their presence the love sport of Radha and Krushna would have been dry and colourless. Thus Radha, Krushna and *sakhi* form an eternal triangle.

Without taking the help of *sakhi* or *duti*, Krushna in disguise or otherwise has also expressed his love before Radha. Banamali has also written such songs categorised as self-messenger *(swayam doutya)*.

VII

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion on Banamali establishes him as an original lyric poet of the eighteenth century. His songs reflect the imagination, feeling and experience of the medieval period dominated by religiosity. In the development of the devotional and love lyric, the poet is a historical link between his predecessors like Deenakrushna Das, Dinabandhu Harichandan and Upendra Bhanja on the one hand and his successors like Gopal Krushna Patnaik, Baladev Rath, etc on the other. His predecessors were slavish in imitating the tradition of romance after the classical pattern. Banamali, however, links up the love of Radha and Krushna to the ideal of romantic love of his own time, thus adding human touch and appropriate realism to the theme.

In language he is a great innovator. While his predecessors clouded their subjects in the jugglery of words, Banamali preferred the colloquial idiom and the popular music pattern. In melody his composition stands in the line of Jayadev. Written in Oriya it emulated the charm of Jayadev's style with its choice of soft and sweet sounding diction, the musical pattern and rhythm. We do not find the like of it in the poems of his predecessors.

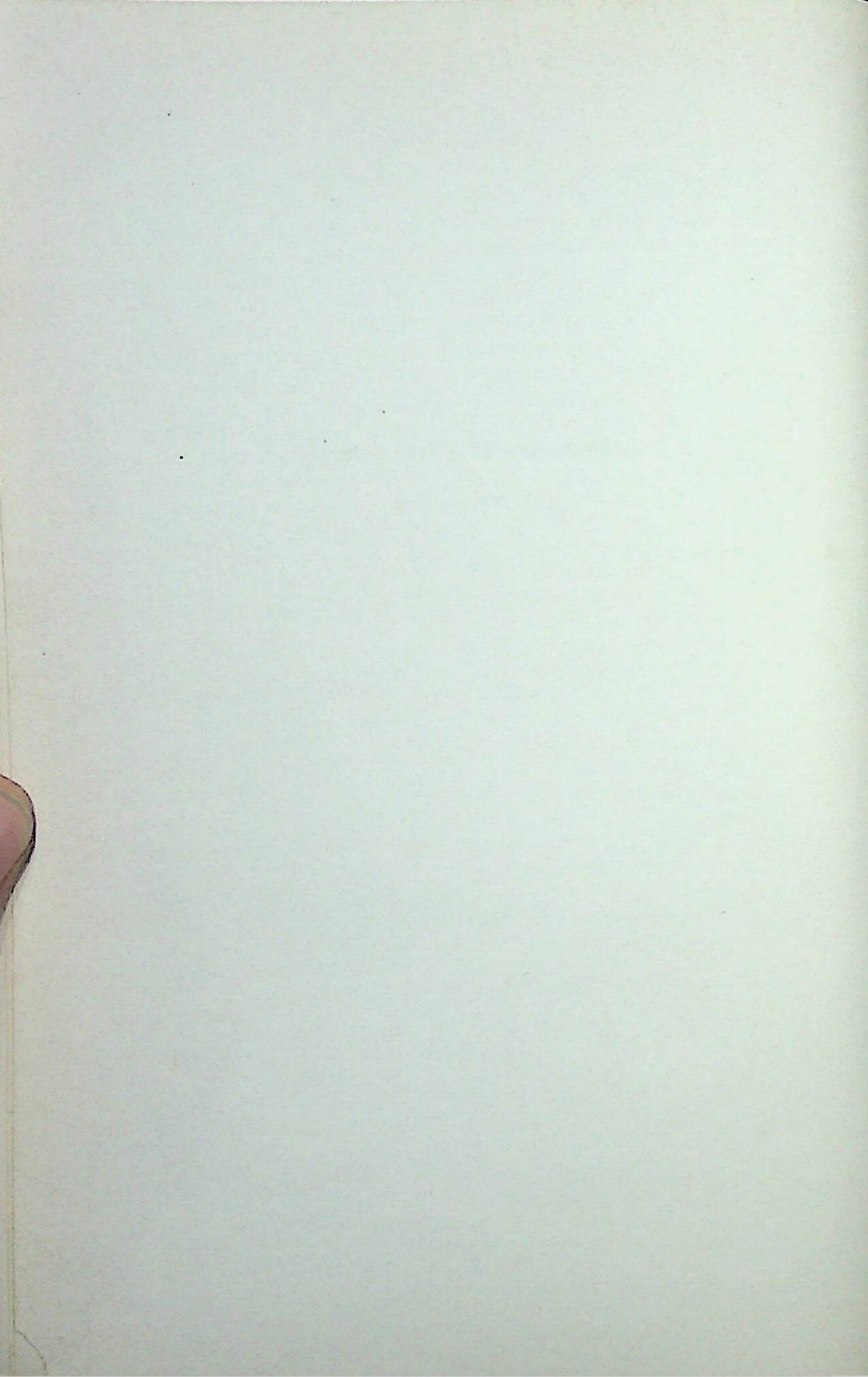
In the realm of devotional lyrics Banamali's contribution seems to be even greater. Of course he follows the tradition of composing devotional songs in simple language adopted by the *pancha sakha*. But while their songs are over-loaded with philosophy and mysticism, Banamali's lyrics are simple and they move more freely like a clear stream. In fact his poems emanate from the heart and readily appeal to the heart and of the reader. This heart-to-heart access is made possible on account of the simplicity and earnestness of feeling of the devotional poet. Besides, the poems acquire free movement due to the simplicity of language. They pick up an easy flow and quick movement on account of the emotionalising effect of the melody and rhythm. Both the devotional and love lyrics of Banamali are a landmark in the development of Vaishnav lyrics in Oriya. It is, as it were, the turning level through which the stream of *padavali*-based Vaishnav lyricism descends to the realistic plane of the common man's love and devotion.

During the nineteenth century, under the changed political and social conditions and due to the impact of English education and culture, the taste of the poets as well as their readers underwent a great change. *Padavalis* could no longer retain the popularity they were enjoying during the previous centuries. Instead, imitation and introduction of the new western forms of lyric poetry, i.e. ode, elegy, sonnet etc. pushed the composition of *padavali* to the background. However, the poems of Banamali, though basically of *padavali* form were not considered out of date. Poets like Parvati Charan Das (1870-1940), Jagabandhu Singh (1897-1978), Mohan Sundar Deb Goswami, Vaishnav Charan Das (1890-1961), Govinda Charan Surdeo (1887-1939), Kali Charan Pattanaik (1898-1978), Lokanath Pattanaik (1898-1965) etc. have composed beautiful Vaishnav *padavalis* on the model of the songs written by Banamali during the present century. Hence, it can be said that the *padavali* song has not completely died out, despite the introduction of western culture. It is still a powerful living force in Orissa which provides a delightful respite to the audience.

It would be unfair if we ignore the shortcomings of Banamali as a poet. It is true that except love, friendship and filial relationship, no other emotions or feelings have found adequate expression in his poems. The poet has failed to depict the beauty of the external world and the then social condition. Explanations for his neglect of this side are not far to seek. We are not to judge him by what he is not, but as he is. His genius lies in the field of musical lyrics or songs rather than in the broad realm of the lyric as it is understood today. Songs are bound to be a smaller vehicle of thought but they have a different approach. Their appeal is primarily to the heart rather than to the head. Banamali's songs have acquired popularity because of their human appeal and musical quality. They also owe their popularity to their basic appeal to the contemporary religious fervour.

Specimens of a Few Songs

(in translation)



A Prayer to Lord Jagannath

I humbly beseech Thee, O' Lord of the poor
I lay my fervent appeal at your feet
Let my mind stay affixed
In venerating Thy glowing feet
To me food and clothings may denied be
But, be not cruel, O' Lord of the world...
Let me rejoice at Thy banner of *nila chakra*[1].
Thirteen festivals a year I would enjoy
As a beggar at Srikshetra[2] feasting on alms
While waiting on saints and souls divine.
I would roam about the Anand Bazar[3] in joy,
Chanting Thy glory all along.
Would I drown myself singing Hare-Rama-Krushna
Into Thy ocean of love.
For this I have severed my ancestral link
And have fallen upon thee as my sole mate
O' Lifter of Govardhan mountain
Blame not your Banamali, and humble slave

Tr. R.K. Mishra

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1. The azure disc made of iron placed on temple top.
2. Modern Puri where Lord Jagannath is enshrined.
3. The pavilion inside the temple premises where cooked food offrered to the main deity is displayed for sale to the pilgrims.

Radha's address to her lady companion

I just had a glimpse of his dark body
To lose my senses all anon.
How timid was I to steal a look so shy!
O' it touched me so deep!
My eyes oozed soothing mist
Smear'd as if, in camphorated collyrium.
How could Mohan's charming beauty
Fill my eyes with joy putting my grief away!
How soothing was his bodily charm!
Even Cupid would feel profoundly blest
Dwelling inside me in my heart's recess.
How did I wear off all my modesty then?
Can the earth show a beauty more fair?
One such, though, among gods may be.
His glowing feet winkless did I stare,
Touched not the earth as it seemed.
Such is the exceeding charm of Mohan
None has seen in the worlds ever.
All my bashfulness I shall shun
And shall run to thee, now.
I pledge before thee, my final word.
Would He, my love, favour Banamali
To Him I would resign all I have
But fate on my way stood
And stray'd my mind from His feet away.

Tr. R.K. Mishra

Radha's address to her companion

Oh my lady companion! Son of Nanda appears ever new even if sighted daily; Love increases, yet mind is not fully content.

His smile and his utterances are full of nectar;

When his words go deep into my ears, my calmness of mind is lost, and such words make a woman forget her duties.

The sight of his lotus-eyes, more beautiful as compared to the eyes of the bird *khanjana*; fish and deer, when touches the heart, it works like a sword as well as the arrow of Madan.[1]

The Creator had given up all his work and devoted himself to the task of creating this image of Krushna for days without number. Even God of love, the most handsome of all beings, would faint by beholding the sight of Shyama (Krishna).

Banamali says, if mind is concentrated on this image, one can never withdraw his eyes. The more one beholds, it appears ever-new.

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1. Madan: God of Love.

Radha's address to Krushna

Move away from the road, oh playful prankster, as I have to go to the Yamuna for fetching water. If you create any wily situation for ferry charges, I would pledge my precious head jewel.

At home, my sister-in-law is highly troublesome; and my mother-in -law behaves like a competitor of mine. Oh holder of Giri Govardhan, do not shout, I would never come this way for you alone.

I am the daughter of King Vrishabhanu; how dare you treat me like a commoner? By dragging my apron-strings, you are creating undue problems. Are you not respectful of another's wife?

Being son of venerable Nanda Maharaj, you are casting evil eye on all the *gopis*. Are you not guilty of killing Putana, a lady while she was feeding you from her breast?

Henceforth I would bring along with me a retinue of lady companions. Banamali submits to Thakurani (Shri Radha) in imploring her not to disappoint the holder of flute, Shri Krushna.

Radha addressing her Lady friend

I am now like the pincers of the blacksmith, my darling, plunged now in water and now in fire, but both are the same to Him;

People hope for happiness through Love, but it has made me most miserable, darling, I remain unsatisfied, however long I gaze upon Him, and my eyes nearly burnt if I do not see Him at all.

This also is another characteristic of this sinful love, that the more you defame Him, the gladder it makes my heart, and it sinks the moment you praise Him.

When we meet, my vision adheres to His personality. A year's looking passes like a moment's and a moment out of sight appears an endless acon.

Happiness there is none in Love. I am dying each moment thinking and thinking of Him only.

Tr. M. Mansingh.

A Prayer to Lord Jagannath

O Jagannath, nothing do I seek from you.
Neither men nor money
I do crave for a cubit of land
On your loving sand, *saradhabali*[1]
My eyes do not seek the sight of anything else save and except the sight of you.
My ears are only eager to hear the praise of you virtues and nothing else.
My tongue does not desire to sing the rustic songs day and night except to utter your names all the time.
Oh the wearer of yellow clothes, my nose is not happy to smell any other aroma but of your used garland, *tulasi*, sandal paste and camphor.
Let my fingers count your names, such as, Rama, Banamali, Harekrushna with the beads. Banamali Das prays that his feet be engaged in travelling the sacred places of visit, sanctified by you.

Tr. K.C. Chand

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1. Saradhabali: Sand of the main road of Puri. It is supposed to be sacred as the wooden car of Lord Jagannath moves on it during the car festival.

A Prayer to Lord Jagannath

Oh possessor of mighty hands; there is none who is more unhappy than I am.
I have sunk and shrivelled for thoughts on lack of food from day to day by shedding tears from my eyes.
I feel much ashamed to beg of unworthy persons. Who would understand the pangs of heart except you, the king of gods?
Those who are occupying power and position are all full of vanity and pride.
They carry the title of *Mahanta*,[1] but are unable to recognise the real *atman*, though well dressed as *sadhus*.
What for should I pray to them since I have a lord like you.
Being attached to your name I am indifferent to begging;
Oh Chintamani;
Oh destroyer of grief and user of *Garuda* as vechicle, you are my only refuge;
You are the friend of the poor, the moon of Nilachala, yet why is your compassion for me so limited?
Oh saviour of the persons who surrender to you; and oh Lotus-eyed; please remove my impediments. Thus Banamali Das beseeches you standing before you near the entrance—*chandana argali*

Tr. K.C. Chand

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1. Mahanta: Head of the monastery

The Superb Dancer

What have my eyes beheld today, O dear,
What a bliss they have gained!
How unfathomable is his loveliness:
Complexion of collyrium blent.

Swinging 'bove fore-lock, the peacock feather
Swift as lightning spread;
Full beam two cheeks with ear-rings bright
Rich with jewels inlaid.

His pendant on chest doth madden the heart,
It vies with midnight moon;
The glow doth gladden the soul of a maiden
As moon, of lotus in bloom.

In bangled hands be holds his blowing flute,
Jingling anklets his feet adorn;
Garlands in layers, of scented flower
Their sweetness far is blown.

Choice the raiment sprinkled with perfume sweet
Charming and neatly worn;
Tell me O dear, if at all could be there
Blemish to Shyam's that form.

Sings Banmali, 'He's the Crown of Actors.'
So the Jewel of Maidens* knows:
Mischievous most is that Lover of pranks
If dress'd in dancing pose.'

Tr. Trilochan Misra

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* Radha, referred to as 'Kishori-mani'

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Banamali Das, one of the finest exponents of *Padavali* literature in Oriya, was a contemporary of Birakishore Deb (1735-1792) of Khurda Raj family. His fame as a Vaishnava devotee and a poet spread throughout Orissa through singers, devotees, dancing girls and even through common people who sought to recite his impassioned songs either for their private prayers to god or to please the gatherings of devotees. A collection of his poems was first published only in 1934, long after his death, under the title *Banamali Padavali*.

Based on the rather inadequate biographical material available about Banamali Das, Dr Janaki Ballabha Mohanty, a reputed scholar and critic of Oriya, has still succeeded in making this monograph both informative and illuminating.

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